



# The All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern  
Minister for Skills  
Department for Education  
20 Great Smith Street  
SW1P 3BT

Sent via email: [ps.smith@education.gov.uk](mailto:ps.smith@education.gov.uk)

22 November 2024

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you in our capacity as Officers of the APPG for Universities to let you know about a meeting held by the group on 14 November on the topic of 'universities in the skills agenda'.

The breakfast meeting was attended by over a dozen senior representatives from universities across the country as well as cross-party members of the House of Commons and House of Lords. Alongside broad discussion amongst attendees, we heard short presentations from Professor Martin Jones, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Staffordshire, Dame Ann Limb, Chair of City & Guilds and Professor Amanda Broderick, Vice-Chancellor of the University of East London.

There was broad consensus that universities represent a major part of the skills ecosystem and should play a significant role in current and future government initiatives such as Skills England, Local Growth Plans and the Industrial Strategy. Universities have extensive experience working cross-departmentally and across local and national government and would welcome the opportunity to play a part in ensuring these nascent initiatives can fully deliver the skills needs of the country. Higher education should be seen as an enabling sector within the Industrial Strategy; our university members would welcome the opportunity to work with you and ministerial colleagues to discuss this further.

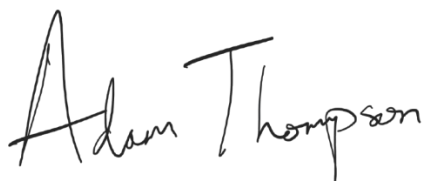
Attendees would welcome assurance from you that both the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) and reformed Skills and Growth Levy will complement the work of Skills England and ensure universities can fulfil their potential to meet employers' increasing needs around higher-level skills. Universities will need to make root and branch changes to their operating models to adapt to the LLE and revamped levy and therefore require government support and a longer-term, sustainable funding settlement.

Questions were raised on how Skills England will operate, particularly in terms of the intersection with roles of existing regulators in the higher-level skills space. Members were keen to stress the importance of understandability within reforms, both for learners and employers. Boosting productivity is an essential national ambition, and it is vital that in-work progression, including through short courses delivered by universities or in conjunction with further education colleges, is at the heart of this.

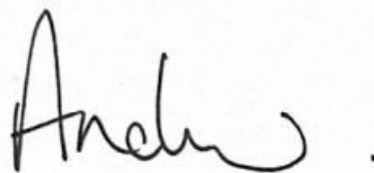
University leaders attending the meeting expressed a strong desire to feed into plans for local economic growth but stressed that the mechanisms available to them varied significantly depending on their local devolution settlement. With their strong local footprints and range of academic expertise, universities can make a positive contribution to the design and implementation of Local Growth Plans but want early assurances that they have been considered by ministers in relevant departments as essential stakeholders, regardless of whether they are located in a mayoral combined authority or not.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to invite you to speak at a future meeting of the APPG for Universities. We are looking to hold a meeting in early February and will follow up with your office about specific dates. In the meantime, we would be delighted if you were able to give a brief address to attendees at an evening reception to celebrate the APPG for Universities' 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 17 December. Please respond to [adam.thompson.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:adam.thompson.mp@parliament.uk) to confirm your availability.

Yours sincerely,



**Adam Thompson MP (Chair)**



**Andrew Snowden MP (Officer)**



**Abtisam Mohamed MP (Officer)**



**Stephen Gethins MP (Officer)**